



Manchester Urban Ponds Restoration Program

City of Manchester Environmental Protection Division
300 Winston Street - Manchester NH 03103
(603) 665-6899 www.manchesternh.gov/urbanponds



The History of Nutts Pond



*Bathers at Nutt's Pond in the early twentieth century.
Photo: Manchester Historical Association*

Nutts Pond has played an important role in Manchester's history since the city's earliest days but today serves only as a testament as to how urban encroachment can impact an aquatic ecosystem. Nutts Pond is one of Manchester's few natural ponds never having been dammed. The remains of a weir are located in the outlet, Tannery Brook, but the pond's physical characteristics are relatively unchanged from its original state.

Since colonial times Nutts Pond has been known by several names. In the mid-1800's, it was known as Fort Pond, but "in ancient time(s) was known as Swager's Pond" (Potter, 1856). It came to be known as Nutts Pond shortly thereafter, named for a popular local circus performer, "Commodore" Nutt. At that time, the Nutt family farm was situated near the pond.

"Commodore" Nutt

"Commodore" George Washington Morrison Nutt was born in Manchester in 1884 and was the son of a New Hampshire farmer. He stood twenty-nine inches tall and weighed twenty-four pounds. Like Tom Thumb, he was discovered by P.T. Barnum, and in fact because of the resemblance between the two, many people suspected that Nutt was in fact Thumb posing under a different name. To exploit the situation, Barnum began to exhibit the two together, billing them as "The Two Smallest Men and Greatest Curiosities Living."



*Commodore Nutt and Miss
Minne Warren.
Photo: Syracuse University
Library Special Collection*

Barnum first placed them on exhibit in New York and made them rich and famous. Tom Thumb and Nutt undertook a three-year tour of Europe during the 1860s where they appeared before almost all of the crowned heads on the continent. After the completion of their European tour, they toured the United States.

They were reported as being graceful, intelligent, witty, educated and refined, exhibiting the most polished manners, and yet only the size of three year old children. They performed songs, duets, dances, pantomimes, orations and military exercises (Historical Society of Cheshire County, New Hampshire)



*Commodore Nutt. Photo:
Syracuse University Library,
Special Collection*

Historical Uses

Nutts Pond has been put to many uses over the years. In 1976 archeological evidence revealed historical records of the existence of a fort on the north shore of the pond (Slown, 1987). In 1746, Archibald Stark, seeing a necessity for a safe haven for colonists from Native American attacks, built a wooden garrison at this site (Manchester Leader, 1929).

The well still exists at the site today although it has long since been filled in. The Manchester Coal and Ice Company, which owned the lot in 1928, deeded the well to the Molly Stark Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) on December 24, 1928.

The Manchester Coal & Ice Company harvested ice at Nutts Pond until at least the 1920's, but preceeding them were at least two other ice companies. Ice harvesting at Nutts Pond probably began about 1860 by A.L. Walker, followed by Dickey & Young, and then L.B. Bodwell & Company (The Mirror, 1899). Nutts Pond ice was described by The Mirror in 1899, as "pure, sweet and clear."

By 1938, Nutts Pond had become a popular swimming and recreation area. A 1938 NH Fish and Game Department survey indicates that the pond was routinely treated with chlorine due to the high volume of bathers, thus preventing any fisheries management plan on the part of the Fish and Game Department. In 1951, the area now known as Precourt Park, on the pond's north side, was sold to the city by the Manchester Coal & Ice Company.

During the 1950's and '60's, Nutts Pond gained popularity as a swimming area and as result the Parks and Recreation Department installed a large scale chlorination system to treat high bacteria levels (Slown, 1987). However, water testing after chlorination revealed that high bacteria levels still prevailed and the pond was closed to public swimming in July, 1968. It was later ascertained that the bacterial pollution was the result of a combined sewer outfall that emptied into the pond at a point near the swimming area. Though new sewer systems were installed in the area to accommodate large-scale commercial and multi-family housing developments, the pollution of Nutts Pond became an increasingly serious problem during the 1960's and '70's (Slown, 1987.)